



Church and Security

A year on from the Christchurch attacks, security awareness has heightened across New Zealand and the aftermath has impacted us all. The Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) shifts the focus from monitoring and recording health and safety incidents to proactively identifying and managing risks so that everyone who attends church or a church-run programme is safe. Understanding the terminology and the legislation will help provide the framework for health and safety at church.

Generally the presbyter, property committee or whoever governs your legal local entity is responsible for holding the main duty of care (responsibility) to ensure, as much as is practicable, the health and safety of all attendees, staff, volunteers and any person at church. Your legal entity (presbyter or property committee) becomes known as a PCBU (person conducting a business or undertaking).

Churches are considered under the act as an undertaking and the legal entity has what is called "a primary duty of care." Your presbyter or property committee member or for example, the person recorded as an officer on the Charitable Trust website of the Department of Internal Affairs is termed as "an Officer" and is personally responsible for ensuring your church is a safe place. Managing the risk (rather than the accident) as far as is reasonably practicable, is how they fulfil their duties as officers under the Act.

Officers cannot distance themselves from this responsibility of care by delegating care and safety to others. They are required to stay informed, connected and intentionally proactive in managing risk. Any decisions made within their role as an officer must consider the health and safety of everyone connected to the church.

Each officer is also responsible for making sure that the church has written policies that clearly outline health and safety expectations in line with the requirements of the HSWA. They must



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have copies of and be familiar with written procedures for dealing with potential problems. Officers must allocate resources to monitor, maintain and strengthen those policies and procedures and deal immediately with any health and safety problems.

Volunteer officers (for example, an elder or property committee member, not employed by the church) are exempt and cannot be held liable under law if they fail in their due diligence duty. However, they are expected to stay knowledgeable and informed and to make resources available to solve problems where undue risk is obvious.

The presbyter, (as a paid officer and a worker) must shoulder the major responsibility for health and safety at their church as they are the person most closely connected to the everyday running of the church. Like all other staff and volunteer workers, they also must take all practical steps to ensure that the church and all its functions are managed in a healthy and safe way.

The HSWA defines a volunteer worker as a person who meets three criteria:

- 1) the volunteer is doing work for the church and the church knows that they are doing work for them

- 2) the volunteer does the work on an ongoing and regular basis
- 3) the work is considered an integral part of the life of the church.

A volunteer worker is "a person who is acting on a voluntary basis, whether or not the person receives payment for out-of-pocket expenses." You can only have volunteer workers in your undertaking if you are firstly defined as a PCBU under the HSWA. Volunteer workers have the same duty of care for themselves and others as other staff and must: 1) take reasonable care of their own health and safety, 2) take reasonable care that what they do or don't do, does not adversely affect the health and safety of others, 3) cooperate with any reasonable policies or procedures the church has in place on how to work in a safe and healthy way, 4) comply with any reasonable instructions given by church officers so that they can comply with HSWA and its regulations.

In summary, even the congregation is responsible in that they must behave in healthy and safe ways and must encourage others to do so, whether they are volunteer workers or not.

We must all focus on proactively identifying and managing health and safety risks, and ensure that health and safety information is shared with everyone but especially those whose health and safety could be directly affected by our actions or inaction.

T R I B U T E

A tribute to Shirley Erena Murray

Shirley Murray, New Zealand's greatest hymn writer, with a global reputation, died in Wellington on Saturday 25 January 2020. Fellow hymn writer Colin Gibson, collaborated with Shirley Murray on many collections. He pays tribute to this remarkable New Zealander.

Shirley Murray was a member of the NZ Order of Merit, an honorary Fellow of the Royal School of Church Music London, a Fellow of the Hymn Society of the United States and Canada, Erik Routley Fellow of the Presbyterian Church of America and University of Otago Honorary Doctor of Literature. Hers was a life of deliberate commitment to the perfection of her craft and complete dedication to the service of God and her Church. In her poem *Something Beautiful for God*, which she herself describes as a hymn of personal dedication, she wrote,

*Something beautiful for God,
in my seeing,
in my being,
something beautiful for God
let the Spirit make of me.
Something meaningful and true,*

*in my living
and believing,
something meaningful and true,
something beautiful and new.*

It is the measure of her achievement that she created a body of hymns and songs whose integrity, beauty, truth and originality have won for her a worldwide reputation.

Shirley discovered her life's work when she took up a ministry of hymn writing at the Wellington church of St Andrew's on the Terrace, responding to her husband's urgent need for modern hymns that would address the contemporary issues with which the pair of them were passionately concerned. She set out her manifesto in her first small publication, *In Every Corner Sing: New Hymns to Familiar Tunes in Inclusive Language*:

'Singing our faith in the present tense means having to stock some corners of the Christian household with new themes. For me, human rights and racism, women and peacemaking all need singing out, and words to sing are hard to find ... Some corners need refurbishing, since the words of the past do not always express the theological emphasis we now value ... I take it for granted that inclusive language is the mode in which Christian people must

express belief.

She went on to write words that have rung true for modern Christians throughout the world, creating new classics, and a whole new landscape of hymns for we New Zealanders to sing. *Honour the Dead* is undoubtedly our greatest war hymn and one that daringly for its time upholds the conscientious objectors we treated so shamefully. *Where mountains rise to open skies*, her great hymn for Waitangi Day, is the nearest we have to a truly contemporary national song. *For the music of creation* has become a universal anthem, while her hymn for the environment *Touch the earth lightly* is sung even in America while Trump dismantles environmental protections as fast as he can.

Her writing revealed a faith that faced the world as it really is, and she sang her song of love into its darkness: 'Shine through our winter's grey, break through depression's day, live in the little deaths we die in growing: meaning for whom we grope, home of our strongest hope, power and peace, through all creation flowing.'

Shirley wrote hundreds of hymns whose quality and passion are acknowledged throughout the Christian world, and rank her with the very best



Shirley Murray

in our heritage of religious song. She showed that the languages of science and te reo could meet in poetry that is full of beauty and truth. And she urged us never to give up on the faith, even though she was often personally ashamed of the behaviour of individuals and groups within its institutions: 'There's never a time to stop believing, there's never a time for hope to die, there's never a time to stop loving, these three things go on.'

As Shirley Murray's friend and fellow hymn writer Marnie Barrell said, 'She has left a legacy of hymns for the Church that is to be.' Let us continue to sing them.